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Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
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REPORT TO PLANNING COMMISSION

SUBJECT

Study Session: El Camino Real Specific Plan

BACKGROUND

On February 5, 2019, the City Council held a study session to review the development of the El Camino Real Specific Plan. Following staff presentation, 34 members of the community spoke on the project, expressing diverse concerns and interests relating to the development of the Plan. Members of the public spoke strongly both in favor and in opposition to increased residential density and the addition of bicycle lanes. Several housing advocates emphasized the need for more housing, while some community members expressed concerns about loss of retail and stated that new development should include more commercial and recreational uses that would benefit the community. Comments were raised by the City Council to address a roadway option that would eliminate a travel lane (Alternative 3A) and add more residential units to the Environmental Impact Report analysis to create additional capacity (with the assumption that the Plan could ultimately support a smaller number).

El Camino Real is the City’s most visible and identifiable commercial corridor. Redevelopment of the existing low-intensity, auto-oriented commercial uses along the corridor into higher density, residential/commercial mixed use is identified as a key land use strategy in the City’s 2010 - 2035 General Plan.

While the General Plan established the El Camino Real as a Focus Area for new residential growth, specified land uses and densities for new development, and provided some policy guidance, it also identified the preparation of a Specific Plan as an implementation tool for the Focus Area. The City Council initiated preparation of a Specific Plan for the El Camino Real Focus Area in 2017 to provide a more detailed level of policy and design guidance to support the successful transformation of the corridor.

The objectives for preparation of the Specific Plan are to establish a land use plan, a circulation plan, urban design standards, and a policy framework that will guide future development and provide developers and the community with clear direction regarding form, massing, density and streetscape for new development.

DISCUSSION

A collaborative and broad-based community involvement process has been implemented to engage community members in the planning of the corridor’s future. The City has been working with a consultant, Raimi and Associates, to ensure that community residents and stakeholders have many opportunities to participate in decision making and inform the contents of the Specific Plan throughout the Specific Plan process. The community engagement process and community input is reviewed by a Community Advisory Committee (CAC), formed in January 2018. To date, the CAC has held four meetings. Additionally, the City has hosted five pop-up engagement activities in the community, two workshops, two online surveys, and one community meeting focused on the potential removal of street parking along El Camino Real to facilitate the creation of dedicated bicycle lanes. Summaries of all of the engagement activities can be found on the El Camino Real website at: www.santaclaraca.gov/ecr <<http://www.santaclaraca.gov/ecr>>

During the engagement activities, a range of land use and right-of-way alternatives, and pedestrian and bicycle treatments were presented to the community and the CAC for their input. Community input from these meetings shaped the draft Land Use Plan and El Camino Real Right-of-Way alternatives as provided in Attachment 1 and 2, respectively.

Draft Land Use Plan

The draft Land Use Plan (Attachment 1) was developed based on input from the community and the CAC and using the current General Plan as a starting point for the discussion. The concept behind the land use plan is to concentrate density in the “activity centers” or nodes along the corridor to allow lower density development at the in-between areas. At the CAC’s last meeting, the CAC had reached consensus to support the draft with the exception of the Mariani’s Inn development site (2500 El Camino Real). There was no consensus as to whether this particular site should stay as the higher density Regional Commercial land use designation or if it should be changed to the lower intensity Community Mixed Use land use designation. Members of the CAC who lived closest to the Mariani development site were opposed to the higher density designation. However, there was consensus by members of the CAC to require more ground floor commercial somewhere between Lincoln Street and Lafayette Street and at Calabazas Boulevard.

As required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will analyze the maximum potential for new development through build-out of the draft Land Use Plan, and account for development applications that are on file (General Plan and Zoning amendments), identify the full potential of environmental impacts that could occur with contemplated development. Accordingly, the EIR would analyze the following growth capacity for the Plan area. It is important to note that is the maximum capacity, and that after the EIR is completed the City Council could select a different project alternative as long as it does not exceed the maximum capacity.

Table: Development Capacity for El Camino Real

	Residential Units	Commercial Square Feet
Draft Land Use Plan Capacity*	6,677	425,229

Pending Development Applications	327	32,306
Total	7,004	457,535
* The General Plan currently identifies capacity to build 2,274 units within the El Camino Real area. 1,142 units have been approved and/or built. A maximum of 4,403 units would be added under the General Plan.		

Community Benefits

As the draft land use plan will potentially allow an increase in residential density in some locations along the corridor or allow lower density residential development without a commercial requirement at other locations, as a next step the Specific Plan process could include an exploration of a structured community benefits requirement for new development projects that benefit from these changes to allowed land uses. This approach would require a developer to provide specific defined benefits in the Specific Plan area in exchange for an increase in density and/or the allowance of a residential only project with no commercial requirement. The specific types of benefits and triggers for obligations for those benefits would be explored with the community and the CAC. Benefits could include a higher level of commitment to on-site amenities (either for residents or the public), green building standards, open spaces, affordability, alternative travel modes, or contribution toward off-site improvements.

Right-of-Way Alternatives

Initially, five right-of-way alternatives for the El Camino Real were presented through the outreach process for community and CAC input. At each outreach event, most favored the addition of bike lanes on El Camino Real, but there was no clear consensus as to how the bike lanes would be achieved and no one alternative was clearly favored. The three alternatives with the most support were presented through a second online survey to receive feedback on those options. Two other alternatives were dropped, both of which included the proposed removal of a travel lane, which would be outside of the scope of the current Specific Plan work plan. Removal of a travel lane on El Camino is both a local and regional issue that would require a much more significant analysis and outreach process. Input from the second survey did not establish a clear community consensus.

The three right-of-way alternatives and the results of the prior community outreach were then presented to the CAC for their input. In general, by consensus the CAC supported right-of-way alternative 2A (removal of on-street parking to accommodate a buffered bike lane with a bus boarding island). It is important to note that adding the bike lane will require parking removal. A preliminary parking analysis identified 446 on-street parking spaces available along El Camino Real within the Specific Plan area. The parking occupancy analysis concluded that on the average throughout the day 31% of these on-street parking spaces are utilized. Almost all properties fronting El Camino Real, with the exception of the properties located at the northeast corner of El Camino Real and Main Street (El Camino Coin Wash & Dry, Custom Hairstyling, El Camino Realty, JC Beauty, and Santa Clara Montessori), the north side of El Camino Real just east of Los Padres Boulevard (Diver Dan's), and the south side of El Camino Real just east of San Tomas Expressway (Gran Prix Power Sports) have sufficient on-site parking to meet their overall parking needs. For the aforementioned properties that lack on-site parking, staff will continue to work with those property owners, and also review bike design alternatives.

Next Steps

The extensive outreach process has informed two key components of the Specific Plan; the draft land use plan and the right-of-way alternatives. The next step in the planning process is to prepare

an environmental analysis as required for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). This analysis will be conducted using the preferred land use plan and a preferred El Camino Real right-of-way design following the City Council direction to proceed.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The action being considered does not constitute a “project” within the meaning of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15378(b)(4) in that it is an informational report that does not involve any commitment to any specific project which may result in a potential significant impact on the environment.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no impact to the City other than administrative staff time.

COORDINATION

This report has been coordinated with the City Attorney’s Office.

PUBLIC CONTACT

Public contact was made by posting the Planning Commission agenda on the City’s official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall Council Chambers. A complete agenda packet is available on the City’s website and in the Community Development Department at least 72 hours prior to a Regular Meeting and 24 hours prior to a Special Meeting. A hard copy of any agenda report may be requested by contacting the Community Development Department at (408) 615-2450, email Planning@santaclaraca.gov.

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ATTACHMENTS

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